

2010 Trafficking in Persons Report Honduras (TIER 2)

Honduras is principally a source and transit country for women and children subjected to trafficking in persons, specifically forced prostitution. Honduran victims are typically recruited from rural areas with promises of employment and trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation in urban and tourist centers, such as Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, and the Bay Islands. Honduran women and children are found in conditions of forced prostitution in Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, Belize, and the United States. In one case, 18 Hondurans were subjected to forced labor in Romania after being lured there by fraudulent job offers. To a lesser extent, women and girls from neighboring countries, including Guatemala and Mexico, are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation in Honduras. In addition to incidents of child sex tourism in the Bay Islands, there have been reports of parents selling their daughters to foreign or local men. The IOM reported incidents of forced labor in Honduras, agricultural and garment sectors.

The Government of Honduras does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. During the reporting period, authorities continued to take law enforcement actions against sex trafficking offenders and effectively used partnerships with international organizations to provide training to government officials and members of civil society. Despite these significant efforts, government services for trafficking victims remained virtually non-existent, laws failed to prohibit trafficking for the purposes of forced labor, and the number of trafficking-related convictions decreased.

Recommendations for Honduras: Amend anti-trafficking laws to prohibit labor trafficking; increase efforts to investigate and prosecute all trafficking offenses, and convict and sentence trafficking offenders, including corrupt officials who may facilitate trafficking activity; improve victims, access to shelter aid and essential services; develop formal procedures for identifying victims among potential trafficking populations; and initiate efforts to raise awareness of human trafficking, including anti-trafficking public awareness campaigns.

PROSECUTION

The Honduran government sustained its efforts to investigate and punish human trafficking crimes over the reporting period. Honduras prohibits sex trafficking through aggravated circumstances contained in Article 149 of its penal code, enacted in 2006, but does not specifically prohibit labor trafficking. For sex trafficking offenses, Article 149 prescribes penalties of 12 to 19.5 years, imprisonment. Such punishments are commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. In 2009, the government consolidated two separate offices to create one unit that investigates all human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation crimes. There were 83 pending investigations into allegations of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children at the end of 2009, and all eight trafficking cases opened during the year involved underage girls. During the reporting period, authorities prosecuted 26 cases of human trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation of children, and obtained five convictions, with convicted offenders given sentences ranging six to 10 years, imprisonment. The government reported no investigations or prosecutions for forced labor crimes. No confirmed allegations of trafficking-related corruption were investigated or prosecuted, though some local immigration officials were reportedly complicit in human trafficking. Honduran authorities collaborated with foreign governments on a number of trafficking cases, and officials trained police, members of the judiciary, and NGO staff on anti-trafficking legislation and victim services.

PROTECTION

The Honduran government provided minimal services to trafficking victims last year. There remained no formal procedures employed by law enforcement personnel to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, such as women and girls in prostitution. The government operated no dedicated shelters or services for trafficking victims, though it referred child trafficking victims to NGOs, and provided medical services through public hospitals. NGOs report that referrals in practice are unorganized and uneven. One NGO provided the majority of victim care and received no direct funding from the government; this organization provided victim services to 73 girls who were victims of sex trafficking. Despite a 2009 report by an international organization highlighting the need for increased services for adult female victims of trafficking in Honduras, few resources, public or private, were available for adult trafficking victims. There are plans to train staff of shelters that currently serve vulnerable populations to care for trafficking victims and to create a system of integrated care for adult victims of trafficking; this initiative will be operated by NGOs and funded by a foreign government. Victims were encouraged to assist in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking offenders, and 14 did so during the reporting period. Some trafficking victims declined to cooperate due to distrust in the judicial system, particularly its ability to ensure their personal safety. There were no reports of victims being penalized for unlawful acts committed as a result of their being trafficked. One Colombian victim of trafficking requested and was granted special status to remain in Honduras. Though the government did not report systematically offering foreign victims legal alternatives to their removal to countries where they may face hardship or retribution, there were no known cases of trafficking victims being deported. During the reporting period, the government designated an official at the border post of Corinto to provide care to unaccompanied minors entering the country and to screen for potential trafficking cases. There was no reported training of Honduran diplomats on human trafficking issues.

PREVENTION

The government sustained efforts to prevent human trafficking during the reporting period, forging partnerships with NGOs and international organizations on several anti-trafficking initiatives. In partnership with the ILO, the government hosted 17 education workshops on commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking for approximately 1,500 university students, government officials, and journalists. During the reporting period, the national anti-trafficking committee, which is comprised of government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations, solicited signatures from hotels and other businesses on a code of conduct prohibiting the commercial sexual exploitation of children, and 36 hotel owners have signed, as well as two rental car agencies. The government reported no prosecutions or convictions of child sex tourists during the past year.